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ABSTRACT

This study empirically examined the quality of work life and job satisfaction of municipal clerks employed in cities in the United States. Questionnaires were sent to a random sample of 10 percent of the membership in the United States of the International Institute of Municipal Clerks. Results of factor analysis produced 12 distinct dimensions of quality of work life: total life space, supervisory relations, treatment as an important person, adequate compensation, safe and healthy working environment, socially relevant jobs, involved and informed employees, development of human capacities, good relations with co-workers, absence of stress, constitutionalism, and variety in the job. Results from 646 respondents revealed that the highest ranked quality of work life factor related to the worker's ability to balance home and work and that only 56% of the respondents were able to achieve this balance satisfactorily. These findings suggest that the municipal work place is a highly demanding climate for which training should include skills in time management. A significant relationship was found between "adequate and fair compensation" and job satisfaction. Only 36.9% of respondents perceived such compensation to exist in their cities. (NB)

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THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN QUALITY OF WORK LIFE AND JOB SATISFACTION: A STUDY OF THE NATION'S MUNICIPAL CLERKS

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THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN QUALITY OF WORK LIFE AND JOB SATISFACTION A STUDY OF THE NATION'S MUNICIPAL CLERKS

This article reports on a study of 10 percent of the membership of the International Institute of Municipal Clerks to determine their Quality of Work Life and the extent of their job satisfaction. Although Quality of Work Life (QWL) is a central concept in much of the literature on personnel management, little empirical research has been done on Quality of Work Life and job satisfaction in the public sector. Exceptions are a study by Nachmias (1988) which examined QWL in the federal bureaucracy and a study by Bruce and Blackburn (1989) which looked at the QWL of Nebraska Municipal Clerks.

Despite the dearth of empirical research, QWL is generally assumed to foster job satisfaction and productivity, and to reduce turnover. The importance of QWL is evidenced in the National Forum, which devoted fourteen articles on the subject in Spring, 1982.

QWL is an elusive concept. Some scholars sing its praises as a means of enhancing employee growth, meaningful jobs, and well-being (Walton, 1978; Kerr and Rosow, 1979; Ouchi, 1981; Peters and Waterman, 1983). Others criticize it as irrelevant to today's bureaucratic workplace (Strauss, 1974; Hackman, 1978; Mohrman and Cummings, 1983).

Those scholars favoring QWL seem to think that it is achieved primarily through a program of coordinated, deliberate activities. A high quality of work life may exist, however, simply as a result of good management. Perhaps because it is difficult to

define "good management", research has tended to focus on programs which enhance QWL.

Three separate thrusts of QWL programs have emerged. One focuses on individual outcomes, particularly job satisfaction. The second thrust concerns technologies and methods for improving work, and emphasizes participative work groups. Whether or not such groups positively correlate with job satisfaction is yet to be determined. The third thrust of QWL is a combination of both outcome and process.

QUALITY OF WORK LIFE DEFINED

When QWL is considered as a process, it is defined as an attempt:

> to provide people at work with structured opportunities to become actively involved in a new interpersonal process of problem solving toward a better way of working and more effective work organization...(Tuttle, 1982:6)

The outcome oriented view defines QWL by saying that:

> A worker can be said to enjoy high quality of work life when he (a) has positive feelings toward his job and future prospects, (b) is motivated to stay on the job and perform well, and (c) feels his working life fits well with his private life (Tuttle, 1982:6).

QWL is said to exist when the following conditions are present:

1. Fair and adequate compensation,
2. Safe and healthy work environment,
3. Opportunities to develop human capacities by performing meaningful work and suggesting new ways of doing job tasks,

4. Growth and security, which includes opportunities to improve knowledge, skills, and abilities and a sense of job security,
5. Social integration which includes the opportunity to interact favorably with both co-workers and supervisor,
6. Constitutionalism, which includes personnel policies which are administered fairly,
7. Total life space, which includes the ability to balance the demands of home and work,
8. Social relevance which includes pride in both the job and the employer. (Huse and Cummings, 1985:199-200).

Nachmias (1988: 171) identifies five elements of QWL in priority order as: 1.) Supervision, 2.) Relations with co-workers, 3.) Challenging, interesting, meaningful job tasks, 4.) Relations between work groups, 5.) Economic dimensions of work which include pay, job security, and promotion opportunities.

QWL is obviously a multidimensional concept, which public administration scholars are just beginning to study. This paper empirically examines the quality of work life and job satisfaction of municipal clerks employed in the nation's cities.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

In the fall of 1988 a four page questionnaire containing forty-eight items was sent to a random sample of ten percent of the membership in the United States of the International Institute of Municipal Clerks. Of 1,100 questionnaires distributed, 646 were returned for a response rate of 58 percent. Thus, the figures reported here are accurate within 4 percent.[1] Part I of the questionnaire contained questions regarding demographics of respondents. Part II consisted of 36 statements relating to QWL, and a

final statement, "Considering everything, I am very satisfied with my job at the present time." Respondents were asked to read each statement, then to circle whether they "agree", "don't know", or "disagree". Statements relating to QWL were derived from the list of criteria identified by Huse and Cummings (1985:199-200). Only the one statement regarding job satisfaction was included, because in previous research by the authors (Bruce and Blackburn, 1989), this one statement had a an average correlation of .83 with fifty-six job satisfaction element questions.

Validity of the instrument was assured by using multiple measures of the same concept. For purposes of validity, seven questions were asked in negative form. Thus respondents were asked to think through their responses, and not just automatically "agree" or "disagree". The size of the sample and high response rate assured reliability within $\pm$ 4 percent.

Data were analyzed in two ways. First, the thirty-six questionnaire items relating to QWL were subjected to factor analysis to determine where clusters of relations exist, and to produce a rotated factor matrix. This reduced the QWL elements to twelve factors, with Eigenvalues ranging from 6.06717 to .41099. In the next step of data analysis, crosstabs tables were constructed to determine the relationship between job satisfaction and the first variable of each factor. Chi-square was used as the test of statistical significance, with a significance of .10000 to .00000 considered worth reporting.

FINDINGS

Clerks from every state and every size of city responded to the survey. Eighty-three percent of the respondents were female, 17 percent were male. Over half of the

respondents (58%) were between the ages of 31 and 50. All but four had completed high school, with 53.7 percent having attended college. Twelve percent had earned a four year college degree and 6 percent had earned a Masters degree. Among the respondents, 77 percent had attended a clerks certification school. Of those, 26.7 percent had graduated and earned the designation of "Certified Municipal Clerk".

Job responsibilities of the respondents varied. Forty-seven percent of the respondents were clerks with full responsibility for the clerk's office. 9.3 percent were administrative heads of staff, 3.6 percent were assistants to the administrator, 26 percent were both clerk and treasurer, and 14 percent were assistants to the clerk. Few of the respondents have job security as 78 percent are appointed and 18.3 percent are elected. Yet most of them (63%) have been in their job for more than five years.

Quality of Work Life

The results of factor analysis, using the varimax rotation produced twelve distinct dimensions of QWL which correspond to the framework developed by Huse and Cummings (1985). Elements included in each factor and their respective codes appear in Table 1. The factors, in order by Eigenvalue appear in Table 2.

(Insert Tables 1 and 2 about here.)

Factor 1 contains four items which measure "total life space" concerns, or the perceived ability of the employee to balance the demands of work and family. Time management issues do not often appear in the research on QWL, although a 1975 definition of QWL (Katzell, et al) and the Huse and Cummings list include them. Yet,

this dimension has face validity. Certainly persons unable to balance demands of work and home are going to perceive a quality of work life that is less than desirable. One might suspect that the strong importance of this dimension emerged because of the large percent of female respondents. There was, however, no statistically significant difference between the responses of men and women to any of the QWL elements.

The second factor of QWL includes items which illustrate "good supervisory relations". This finding is consistent with other research. Nachmias (1988) discovered it to be "the most significant dimension of QWL in the federal bureaucracy". This element is especially important in light of the 1988 GAO report which indicates that a major issue in the public service is the attraction, motivation, and retention of committed and competent public employees (GAO, 1988). The role of supervision directly impacts this issue.

The third factor includes items which reflect that the employee has input into decisions and is "treated as an important person". The proliferation of Quality Circles and their success stories testify to the importance of seeking and utilizing employee input into decision making (Denhardt, et al, 1987; Ouchi, 1981).

"Adequate compensation" items appear in the fourth factor. This is again consistent with the Nachmias (1988) research, and especially important in light of the GAO report which states, "unfortunately, the federal government's pay structure has broken down" (1988:5).

"Safe and healthy working environment" elements comprise the fifth factor. While these elements are frequently taken for granted in the public sector, their importance to quality of work life seems evident. Working environment issues in offices may manifest themselves in the concern for smoke-free environments.

The sixth factor contains the elements which reflect that the job is "socially relevant" and includes issues of the city's reputation as an employer as well as its reputation for providing services. This element reflects one of the components of an enriched job (ie., task significance) as described by Hackman and Oldham (1975).

Factor 7 contains items which indicate that the employee "is involved and informed". Such issues as involvement, being informed, and fair treatment all comprise this factor, which appears to be a sub-set of "good supervisory relations". Factor 8 contains items which reflect that the employee's supervisor encourages the "development of human capacities", thus Factor 8 is the third QWL factor directly related to supervisory competence.

Factors 9, 10, and 11 all contain items directly related to competent supervision. Factor 9 refers to "good relations with co-workers" and suggests the value of participatory management in the work group as well as the necessity for social interactions.

In Factor 10, "absence of stress." the supervisor also has a role to play. Research at both A T & T and the Defense Department indicates that a supportive supervisor can protect employees from stress (Coleman, 1984; Huse and Cummings, 1985). Factor 11, "constitutionalism", or the existence and fair administration on equal opportunity policies and procedures is greatly within the purview of the supervisor who is the line representative of the agency's policies.

Not all elements of QWL were experienced in the same proportion. Table 3 shows the percent of respondents who indicated the presence of each factor in their work environment.

(Insert Table 3 about here.)

Job Satisfaction

In this survey, 81.4 percent of respondents agreed that, "Considering everything, I am very satisfied with my job at the present time". This varied significantly (at the .02186 level) by state, from highs of 100 percent in Arkansas, Arizona, Indiana, Maine, North Dakota, New Hampshire, Rhode Island, Tennessee, Vermont and West Virginia to a low of 60 percent in Maryland. The 81.4 percent satisfaction rate is higher than found in many jobs. Taylor (1977) determined that 80 percent of those he surveyed are satisfied with their jobs and Schneider and Dachler (1978) report that only 58 percent of managers consistently express high job satisfaction, while only 56 percent of non-managers are satisfied. In a study of municipal clerks in the state of Nebraska, Bruce and Blackburn (1989) found that 86.3 percent of that group are highly satisfied.

The relation between education and job satisfaction was unusual. The significance of the relationship between job satisfaction and attainment of a degree was .01252, with 26.8 % of those who have a college degree reporting dissatisfaction with their job, while only 16.7 % of those with no degree were dissatisfied. This same pattern held true for graduates of Clerks Certification School: 21.3 % of the graduates were dissatisfied, compared to 18 % of the non-graduates. It may be that a college degree or graduation from a certification school leads to the expectation of greater pay and prestige. When that doesn't happen, dissatisfaction occurs.

Differences significant at the .00000 level were found between those who experience job satisfaction and have QWL factors 2,3,4,5,8,10,and 11 present in their work environment and those who do not. Differences significant at the .00006 level exist

for Factor 1, and at the .00002 level for Factor 9. Factors and the Chi-square significance of their relationship with job satisfaction are shown in Table 4.

(Insert Table 4 about here.)

Chi-square also provides information on the strength of the relationship between two nominal variables. The differing values of Chi-square, identified in Table 4, indicate that the different elements of QWL have different impacts on job satisfaction. The strongest relationship (X^2=99.57093) is between job satisfaction and the respondent's belief that he/she is treated as an important person. The second strongest relationship is between a safe and healthy working environment and job satisfaction (X^2=58.0853). Weakest relationships are between job satisfaction and "employee feels involved and informed" (X^2=11.87339) and "variety in work" (X^2=18.05017). These strong relationships between job satisfaction and quality of work life factors have a number of implications for personnel management.

IMPLICATIONS

This research adds to the knowledge about quality of work life in the public work place. The finding that the highest ranked (according to Eigenvalue) QWL factor relates to a worker's ability to balance home and work and that only 56% of the respondents are able to achieve this balance satisfactorily implies that the municipal work place is a highly demanding arena for which training should include skills in time management. The importance of the supervisory role in setting the parameters of QWL is of equal importance. Programs in supervisory management and communication will be

one way to enhance QWL. The significant relationship between "adequate and fair compensation" and job satisfaction is another area which requires further study. While it is indeed difficult to define "adequate and fair compensation," only 36.9 percent of respondents perceive its existence in their city.

This study was confined to municipal clerks in the nation's municipalities. To extend the knowledge on QWL in the public sector, similar studies of different groups of employees at other levels of government are clearly indicated. With the renewed interest at the federal level in attracting and retaining "the best and the brightest" QWL becomes a major issue and one about which much is still to be learned.

ENDNOTES

1. Welch, Susan and John C. Comer (1983), Quantitative Methods for Public Administration. (Chicago: The Dorsey Press), p. 158. When a population size of 10,000 yields a sample size of between 566 and 964, results have a reliability of $\pm$ 4 percent.

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Table 1

Questionnaire Items in Each Factor
And Their Codes

Code	Item
Factor 1	
Q31*	I have so much to do for my job, I don't have time for my family.
Q46	I am able to comfortably balance home and work.
Q34	I am satisfied with the amount of free time I have.
Q16*	I believe that too much work is expected of me.
Factor 2	
Q21	I would rate my supervisor highly in helping with job related problems.
Q24	I believe that my boss is aware of the difficulties I experience.
Q26	Communication between me and my boss is good.
Q33	I always know where I stand with my supervisor.
Factor 3	
Q14	In my job, I am treated as a responsible, important person.
Q30	I have adequate authority to carry out my job.
Q29	I have input into decisions that are made in my department.
Q17	My job is important
Q32	People in the community respect me because of my job.
Factor 4	
Q39	I believe my salary is about the same as I would earn elsewhere.
Q43	I receive adequate and fair compensation.
Factor 5	
Q44	My working conditions are safe and healthy.
Q45	My work is meaningful to me.
Q12	I have pleasant work surroundings.
Factor 6	
Q36	I think the general public believes the City is doing a good job.
Q37	The city has a good reputation as an employer.
Factor 7	
Q38*	I believe that management can do more to improve relations between themselves and the workforce.
Q20*	I would like to be more involved and informed about the total operation of the City.
Q27	I am well informed about personnel policies.
Q28	I believe personnel policies are almost always administered consistently.

Table 1 (continued)

Factor 8	
Q41	My supervisor actively encourages me to seek new educational opportunities.
Q40	My supervisor encourages me to suggest new ways of doing work.
Factor 9	
Q13	I have good relations with my co-workers.
Q23	My co-workers cooperate to get the job done.
Factor 10	
Q42*	I am under a great deal of stress because of my job.
Q15	I don't believe there is too much pressure in my job.
Factor 11	
Q25	People in my City are treated fairly regardless of race, sex, or age.
Factor 12	
Q10	I have a lot of variety in my job.

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* These items were asked in negative form as a validity check, then were re-coded prior to data analysis.

Table 2
Factor Matrix for Variables Measuring
Quality of Work Life

Variables	Factors											
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12
Q31	.773											
Q46	.699											
Q34	.684											
Q16	.499											
Q21		.701										
Q24		.637										
Q26		.628										
Q33			.565									
Q14			.595									
Q30			.592									
Q29			.571									
Q17			.467									
Q32			.354									
Q39				.622								
Q43				.604								
Q44					.571							
Q45					.498							
Q12					.466							
Q36						.631						
Q37						.531						
Q38							.439					
Q20							.427					
Q27							.363					
Q28							.352					
Q41								.532				
Q40								.498				
Q13									.611			
Q23									.500			
Q42										.596		
Q15										.486		
Q25											.636	
Q10												.625
Eigenvalue	6.067	2.222	1.407	.998	.864	.733	.657	.564	.519	.498	.477	.411
percent of variance explained by factors:	16%	5.8%	3.7%	2.6%	2.3%	1.9%	1.7%	1.5%	1.4%	1.3%	1.3%	1.1%

Table 3
Presence of QWL Elements

Element	Percent of Respondents with Element Present
Total Life Space	52.2 %
Good Supervisory Relations	56.4 %
Treated as Important Person	84.9 %
Adequate and Fair Compensation	32.4 %
Safe and Healthy Working Environment	91.7 %
Social Relevance	69.4 %
Employee Feels Involved and Informed	16.4 %
Development of Human Capacities	62.6 %
Good Relations with Co-workers	96.7 %
Absence of Stress	53.0 %
Constitutionalism	81.8 %
Variety in Work	98.1 %

Table 4

Significance of the Relationship
Between
Job Satisfaction and Quality of Work Life

QWL Element	Chi-square	df	Significance
Total Life Space	24.5644	4	.00006
Good Supervisory Relations	41.83678	4	.00000
Treated as Important Person	99.57093	4	.00000
Adequate and Fair Compensation	36.04748	4	.00000
Safe and Healthy Working Environment	58.08503	4	.00000
Social Relevance	46.62744	4	.00000
Employee Feels Involved and Informed	11.87339	4	.01832
Development of Human Capacities	41.30284	4	.00000
Good Relations with Co-workers	26.59374	4	.00002
Absence of Stress	31.93995	4	.00000
Constitutionalism	36.84031	4	.00000
Variety in Work	18.05017	4	.00121